4:Phillips E-4,5 (1956-1957) 1966
AO7 Central Thai AO7
Bang Chan
Thailand AO1

whole, depends in large part on one's frame of reference.[1] In the most general terms, the people of Bang Chan are like almost all ethnic Thai peasants (excepting on some counts Thai Moslems and some of the economically disenfranchised people of the Northeast) in that they have a keen sense of membership in the nation-state with a deep loyalty to the Crown, speak the Thai language, are Therevada Buddhists, are outwardly highly deferential to the authority of the Central government, and have a conception of the good life that stresses fun, physical comfort and security, intellectual simplicity and practicality, and a moral (as contrasted with a natural) ordering of the universe. Too, like the vast majority of their rural compatriots,[2] they are engaged in the production of rice, an activity which to them is not only an economic operation (Ingram 1955, Janlekha 1955) but almost a way of life, being bound up with their social structure, dietary habits, religious practices, and even their philosophical (J. R. Hanks 1961) and aesthetic conceptions.

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[1] For readers unfamiliar with Thailand, the nation-state, it should be noted that the country is predominantly rural; 84 percent of the total national labor force is in agriculture and there are only ten towns with populations of 20,000 people or more, in which 6 percent of the national population (1947 census) live. Although Bangkok has a population of approximately 1,200,000, the second largest city, Chiengmai, has only 60,000 (1957 estimate).

The nation also has a high degree of ethnic homogeneity, 82 percent of the population considering themselves native Thai (1957 estimate). The largest ethnic minority group is the overseas Chinese, comprising 11.3 percent of the population (1953 estimate, from Skinner 1957), the balance being Malays, Cambodians, and Indians; the so-called tribal groups number in toto only about 150,000 people.

The religious composition of the country is 94.1 percent Buddhist, 3.9 percent Moslem, 0.5 percent Christian, and 1.5 percent "others," many of whom are tribal animists. Thai Buddhism is of the Southern (Therevada, Hinayana, or "Lesser Vehicle") variety and as practiced by most Thai, has syncretized within it many Brahmanic and traditional Southeast Asian animistic elements (see the chapter on "Religion" in Sharp *et al.* 1956, and Textor 1960). The largest minority religion, Islam, is practiced by ethnic Malay living in the four southernmost provinces of Thailand, as well as by some ethnic Thai—many of them descendants of former Malay slaves or war prisoners—scattered through the areas north and east of Bangkok, including Bang Chan, where they comprise 9.8 percent of the local population. Relationships between Buddhists and Moslems, at least in Bang Chan, are quite amicable and except for ideal prohibitions against intermarriage and occasional offhand remarks such as "Moslem women are loose" or "Moslems kill animals," there is little overt hostility between the two groups. Certainly few Bang Chaners ever distinguish between their Buddhist and Moslem neighbors when arranging a work group, selecting a drinking partner, or even compiling a guest list for a son's ordination.

[2] Janlekha (in Sharp *et al.* 1953: 110) indicates that 55 percent of the total national labor force is involved solely in the cultivation of rice—which occupies approximately 90 percent of the total cultivated land area—and as many as 92 percent of all agricultural households are rice households. The 55 percent figure excludes all those people who are involved in the transportation, milling, storing, and distribution of rice. Eighty-five percent of the population of Bang Chan (1953) are rice farmers.